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Preparations When We're "Expecting"

Waiting for the birth of a child is a complicated thing filled with joy and anticipation, doubts, and questions. In the months before our children were born, I remember the endless preparations and decisions. What color to paint the nursery? Do we find out if it's a boy or a girl? Cloth or disposable diapers? Bottle-feed or breast-feed? Am I prepared for being a parent? Will I be a good father?

The anticipation of something as precious and awe-inspiring as the birth of a child drives us to make whatever preparations we can. Expecting parents can't make the pregnancy go by any aster, but their joy and anxiety can definitely motivate them to take parenting classes, talk to other parents, tour the maternty ward, and pray a lot! Anticipation promotes preparation.

Advent is such a time of expecation and anticipation. We not only remember Jesus' birth, but Advent, perhaps more signifiantly, points us to the second coming of Jesus. As we prepare to celebrate the past event of Christ's birth, we also remember — with joy, anticipation, and awe — that Christ will come again. This is fearsome good news—a reality that wakes us up from the ordinariness of life, to the promises of Christ's reign, and the possibilities that today may be the day of Christ's coming. Anticipation of that reality should promote our preparations.

My prayer is that the excitement of celebrating Christ's birth will spill over into a joyful anticipation of Christ's coming again. May the expectation of that wonderful and awesome event awaken our hope and enliven our actions. Through prayer and reflection, acts of mercy, and renewed commitment to Sunday worship, may we be prepared to say on the day of Christ's coming the words of the great Advent hymn, "Therefore we sing to greet our King; for ever let our praises ring."

God's blessings for a Holy Advent.

-The Rev. A. J. Heine, St. Augustine's, Metairie, Louisiana

The Song of Mary

Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

My soul doth magnify the Lord, * and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.

For he hath regarded *

the lowliness of his handmaiden.

For behold from henceforth *

all generations shall call me blessed.

For he that is mighty hath magnified me, *

and holy is his Name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him *

throughout all generations.

He hath showed strength with his arm; *

he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat, * and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things, *

and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel, * as he promised to our forefathers,

Abraham and his seed for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: * as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

The Daily Office, Morning Prayer Rite
 The Book of Common Prayer, p. 5

Mary sings us salvation. She sings it to us with poetry and balance

and rhythm. And notes. She sings us her song. Magnificat.

Mary's is not a solo voice. She sings in harmony with the ancient She sings old words. She sings with the hope of every Son of Jaco who has ever hoped. She hopes with the assurance of a people who cling to the promises of God. She waits with every descendant of Israel who has ever set a place for Elijah. Messiah would bring sa vation, a day when justice would be established and covenant con munity would be exacted.

What are the images on her horizon? What colors her view? Does she see the poor and lowly exalted, because she herself is of low estate? Does she see the proud scattered and the powerful brought low, because she herself is fragile and frail? Does she see the hungry filled and the rich emptied, because she is hollow and rayenous?

Are these her own "sour Nazarene grapes"?

Is she the poor with a chip on the shoulder, waiting for a reversal of fortunes; the marginalized, waiting for the oppressors to get theirs? Maybe. Maybe not. But the tradition that has grown up

around Mary would suggest, not.

Mary's is an antiphonal voice, a conversational chorus, in response to prophets and the women who bore them. Mary borrows language from Hannah of ten centuries past. Hannah refrains, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God ... the bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength."

In Hannah's vision, "those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil." And

"the poor rise up from the dust, the needy from the ash heap."

These women cry out for the righting of wrong, when there is wrong done, not for the reversal of fortunes for the sake of the reversal of fortunes. They require equity, not wealth and prosperity mounting for some at the expense of others. They demand that power be exercised for health and salvation, not exploited for the crushing of backs and the coercion of the weak.

Mary begs voice from prophets not yet born. In fugue-like fashion Mary sings to a preacher's son, 20 centuries yet to come, who's been to the mountain and has a dream. Mary sings to him, and he echoes the canon of an 8th century B.C. fig-dresser-turned-prophet, from the Northern Kingdom, Israel: "Let justice roll down like waters, right-bousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Mary sees what has been ordered from the beginning. Nativity is the episode; Incarnation, the precise moment when all of time is fulfilled. In verb tenses we don't even understand, these mighty acts, the says, are begun in the past, continuing in the present and endur-

ng and completed in the future.

Do we realize that when we sing Magnificat,
we are Moses and Hannah and Isaiah;
we are Martin Luther King, Jr. and the prophet Amos;
we are Bishop Desmond Tutu and Sister Theresa and the Mothe
of our Lord?

Not a day goes by that the church doesn't sing the Magnificat least twice, in the daily office for both morning and evening. We sir her song, not because we necessarily venerate the Virgin Mary, be because her song is the essence of our salvation:

The peace of God;

The presence of Justice and Righteousness; God's kingdom on earth.

Magnificat is the rare note that spans the distance. It makes us was with expectation in Advent. It makes us rejoice at Christmastide. With the third of it because it celebrates Incarnation; light into darkness and God come down. But Magnificat is not seasonal.

It is daily. It is life. It is normal fare. The church in its order of praying arranges Mary's vision of salvation as the setting for ordaily lives. The wisdom of the church couches our day with Magnificat. It is where we live; God in the world and in the flesh.

Magnificat is our battle cry for justice when we are oppressed. is sung Torah, a hymn-tune of equity and truth. It gives syllable for exultation when we are overcome by God. It fills us when we are empty and gives us a great company when we are lonely and good things when we are hungry.

Mary sings our salvation. The same mother voice that sings lulls by, roars for justice and wails for God's reign. The person of Marcan bring it dangerously close. She is warmth and comfort. She pure and raw passion. She is accessible and vulnerable and she take us in.

With all those cattle lowing, in the silence of night, we can hear he song. She can bring us God in his kingdom, because she birthed h son, and gave God flesh.

The Rev. Ruth Lindberg Cummings, Trinity, Columbus, Georg

The Empty Stocking

The stockings were hung by the himney with care, with hopes that it. Nicholas soon would be there."

- Clement Clark Moore

f you like sentimental movies, our season has arrived. All the etworks are dusting off those hristmas classics and very soon vill be showing them ad nausem. Three special favorites are Airacle on 34th Street, It's a Vonderful Life, and The Bishop's Vife. The last one stars David liven, Cary Grant, and Loretta oung. It is a touching story bout an angel named Dudley played by Cary Grant) who omes to earth to help the Bishop played by David Niven) get his riorities back on track. In the ourse of straightening things ut, Dudley falls in love with the ishop's wife (played by Loretta oung). At the conclusion of the lm, with snow gently falling utside, the Bishop preaches a ermon with which I have lways been taken. What follows my memory and adaptation of is remarks.

The Empty Stocking

This is the story of the Empty tocking, a story which you may r may not have heard before,

but which bears hearing again and again.

A long, long time ago on a wondrous night, a bright star appeared in the sky, a star which mysteriously moved and finally stopped over a stable in the small town of Bethlehem. On that wondrous night, angels sang in the heavens in tribute to the child born in that stable.

We still remember that night. We will gather in our churches on Christmas Eve to celebrate that birth. We put a star atop our Christmas trees and sing carols, the songs the angels sang. And as a part of the Christmas Season and Spirit, in imitation of the Magi, we give gifts. We work our way frantically through stores picking up presents so our parents, children, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, cousins and friends, all those close to us, will have a gift from us on Christmas morning. Everyone's stocking gets filled, except one. That stocking belongs to the person whose birth we celebrate on Christmas, the Christ Child. Sadly, it's his birthday we celebrate.

That empty stocking needs to be filled with gifts from each of

us. What gifts can we bring to the Christ Child? The Magi brought him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Enormous cathedrals have been built in his honor. What meaningful gifts can we possibly give? We can give him precious gifts which he and this world desperately need: human kindness, love, and compassion for others! These are the only gifts which will fill the empty stocking of the Christ Child. The empty stocking is a symbol of the need of so many people who live in our world. To celebrate Christmas but forget about that need is to miss the meaning of his birth.

When that star in the East hung low in the heavens and drew those people to the manger in which the Christ Child lay, it shone as a beacon of hope to all, to you and to me. That hope, born again on Christmas, is a realization of what it means to be one of God's children. The star of Christmas calls us to come close to the manger and see the face of God in the person of an innocent child, a child destined to grow and give his life totally for others. When we look into the manger, we see an innocence which was once ours, an innocence of goodness and trust which we are summoned return.

It is so simple and yet so complex and confusing. Jesus is bount a world of power and mighbut these are not the possession he craves. God enters the world on Christmas in the person of the Christ Child — weak, humble and defenseless. And he gives the world the priceless gift of approximation of these qualities. May we, I pray, come away from on celebration of Christmas with personal awakening of the God power of these timeless values.

I hope that on Christmas morning you will find your stocking filled with all that you want an need. But I also hope that you will hang up the stocking of the Christ Child and in this comin year, will try to fill it with the gifts God gives to you — huma kindness, love, and compassion for others. Christ's stocking cannot remain empty if there is to be peace on earth. When the stocking of the Christ Child is filled ours will be filled too.

The Rev. Richard B. Tudo
 St. Barnabas
 Florissant, Missou

O Come, Emmanuel

"O come, O come, Desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind; bid thou our sad divisions cease, and be thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

Of all the Advent hymns, O come, O come, Emmanuel must be among the all time favorites. When I read these words I am taken back to my 6th grade Christmas concert. This was back in the time when we had Christmas events in public school. I remember driving to school with my father at the wheel of the family car. Mom was sitting next to him. My brother, sister, and I were in the back seat trying to stay warm. I was very nervous and excited. This was to be my first public singing event. I do not remember how the evening went. I simply remember that my family was together, and together, we had begun the season of preparation for Christmas.

The season of Advent is based on the long advent that led up to the first Christmas so long ago. The chosen people, the nation of

Israel, have had a mixed history. At one season of their history their people prospered, their nation and lands increased, and God seemed to bless everything they did. At other times it seemed as if they could do nothing right, they were defeated by foreign powers, lost their lands and independence, and almost lost their identity. In the midst of their wandering away and back again to God, God never left their side. At every step along the way, God's promise was theirs. This promise was that one day, a savior would come to them. And this savior would lead them back home to the relationship with God they had been chosen to enjoy.

The first verse of "O come, O come, Emmanuel" speaks of this long advent. The word "Emmanuel" means God with you. The first advent was a period of almost 600 years in which the nations of Israel and Judah waited, anticipated, and longed for the coming of the messiah and their restoration. The first Christians realized that this first advent season came to an end in the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

The First Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of our

annual season of anticipation for the coming of Christ. For us, Advent is not primarily about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It is about the coming of the messiah at the end of time, and to us as individuals, at the end of our own time. Like the first advent, none of us know how long this period of anticipation will last. But because we are people who dwell in time and space, we have marked out the four Sundays before Christmas as a time to remind ourselves that we wait for Jesus to come once again to lead us all home to that fulfilled relationship with God we have been created to enjoy. The promise is that this relationship, which we call the Kingdom of God, will be a new order in which humanity has learned to live in harmony with God, each other, and the entire created realm.

I may not be able to remember how the evening of my sixth grade Christmas concert ended. But I feel reasonably certain that I was too nervous to be thinking of peace on earth and good will toward all. I am confident of this. Those memories of Advents and Christmases past have pointed my heart toward something new

and better; something that has never quite come fully true, ye my heart knows beyond a shad ow of a doubt will be realized some day, and which I awai with eager longing. I pray tha your memories and this Adven point your hearts in this direction as well.

As we go about this season of decorating our homes with ornal ments loaded with memories; as we carefully shop for just that right gift to express our love for another; and, as we look for ways to make a gift that will make a life-changing difference for those less fortunate than our selves (like St. Nicholas did) let's keep in mind what our hearts tell us to be true.

"Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shal come to thee, ... "

That is God's promise.

- The Rev. David Elsensohn St. Peter's by-the-Sea Sitka, Alaska



The Voice Of This Calling

Jesus...saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he arose and followed him. (Matthew 9:9)

 $oldsymbol{1}$ he twelve apostles whom Jesus called out to be especially with him, and to be the foundation stone of the new Israel, the church which is the first-fruits of the new creation, were a strange and motley crew. Fishermen from Galilee, two (James and John) nicknamed Boanerges "the thunder boys" like some anticipation of a teenage gang; Judas a bandit, one of the Sicarii; Simon a revolutionary, one of that Zealot party who thought that taking up arms was the only way in which God would be forced to act and show his hand; and Matthew, the quisling tax-collecor, a first century cash-for-honours type, compromising for gain and so outcast from the strict puritanism of the Pharisees. Built on the foundaion of the apostles and prophets writes St. Paul, built on this group with, as the Gospels show, ts rivalries about greatness, and who shall be first; and a group who for all their being with Jesus sleep through his agony in

Gethsemane as danger approaches, and at his arrest run away, with the exception of Peter who denies him through fear, and the Beloved Disciple found at the foot of the cross on which the king of glory dies in agony, darkness, and desolation. It is this motley crew of which Jesus makes the foundation of the church, transforming them by the whirlwind Spirit from heaven whose tongues of flame, the fiery wall of heaven in Jewish tradition, enflame and inspire them. It is these apostles who are the source of the apostolic ministry handed down to us through the centuries as a supernatural grace and a precious gift to us. It is something we receive, not something we frame and fashion for ourselves. As the great nineteenth-century theologian F.D. Maurice liked to remind us, "the kingdom of God does not come by arrangements of our own."

It is good that we should remember these things at the beginning of this Synod when the nature and character of apostolic ministry will be so much at the centre of our debates. It is good that we should begin here stretching out our hands to receive the Bread of Life and the

Cup of eternal salvation. It is good that we should be reminded that only the Lord has power to transform. To receive communion is exactly that — to receive the belonging-togetherness which is our being in Christ, whose life-giving Spirit is the basis of our identity.

 ${f I}$ f quires are places where they sing, then synods can be places where they prattle. Charles Wesley prayed in a well-known hymn — "Preserve me from my calling's snare, and hide my simple heart above." The calling's snare is there for all of us, as it was for the twelve who so often tried to fashion the kingdom Jesus proclaimed in their own likeness. It is there for bishops; it is there for clergy; it is there for those who serve as staff. Over a half-century ago, Michael Ramsey went to a great gathering called by the World Council of Churches at Evanston, Illinois. He did not like it. "For over a fortnight," he wrote, "the whirl of oratory, discussions, committees and documents continued without pause." This clouded judgement.

Great matters of religion need thought, and thought requires spaces of quiet and leisure. The profoundest matters of theolog cannot be illuminated by high pressure drafting. Why should such procedures be the mediur through which the Holy Spirspeaks to the church? "thought," he said, "that the dominant theologies in the discussion lacked the right starting point if the doctrine of creation and the right goal in the Beatific Vision with the call to holiness as the way to it: 'we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.'"

The way of patience and prayer the sense of the church and it ministry as a gift received; the call to unity as that which the Lord requires of us; vows befor votes — all these are thing which we need to heed if we are to be truly a Synod — those wheare, as the very name of Synoreminds us, journeying on the way, in Christ and to Christ.

William Temple's biographer speaking of the Church Assembly, the predecessor of this Synod, for which Temple had fought so strongly, reflected sadly, "the legalists were soon in control; the voice of the Assembly is now the voice of the administrator, not of the propher and so long as its constitution

and time-table remain unrevised...its present tone and temper will persist."

 ${
m M}$ atthew heard a voice, a compelling voice to come and follow, and he left the tax collector's office and followed Jesus. It was a moment of transformation. It is a call to discipleship which we need to hear over and over and over again. For we will be nothing, this Synod will be nothing, if we do not hear and respond to "the drawing of this love and the voice of this calling." The Anglican Newman spoke of coming to this Blessed Sacrament, of kneeling down in humility, and of stretching out of hands to receive the life of Christ himself. "In this way," he said, "Christians receive the Gospel literally on their knees, which betokens a different habit of mind from that which sitting and istening engender."

We pray that this Synod may be preserved from its calling's snare, and like Matthew hear the call to follow in obedience his

Lord and ours.

- The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Rowell, Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe, via The Times Online, www.timesonline.co.uk

Christ's Birth

While I was explaining where Jesus was born to a group in children's chapel I asked them to tell me what they saw in the manger scene. "Animals." "Shepherds." "A baby."

"That's right," I said. I wanted to emphasize the fact that the manger was in fact a feed box for animals and not a very special place — it was used to feed animals. One little hand shot up into the air and without waiting shouted, "That's not Jesus; that's just a baby!" I explained that Jesus was in all respects just like us — he was born, he spent time as a baby, as a child, and even as a teenager before he was Jesus the man.

Although the child understood I think there was part of him that didn't grasp that Jesus was a real baby. I think the fact that God chooses to reveal God's own image in a baby is troubling - it is so vulnerable. It is so open to being wounded. The Bible's image of a child in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger is pushing us to think in ways that do not come naturally.

Vulnerable comes from the Latin word for wound.

In being born of a woman God is opening God's self to being wounded. It is God's vulnerability that is so profound during the Christmas and Epiphany season. But it is also vulnerability that shapes the season of Lent and Easter. In short, being vulnerable is the core of being Christian. We spend so much time protecting ourselves, insuring ourselves, defending ourselves. This season let us contemplate what it means to be vulnerable before God and each other. If we are to build a community of faith that is truly in the image of Christ, perhaps we should be letting go more than taking control. Faith is not about greater security but rather greater vulnerability. Barbara Brown Taylor correctly points out that it is "shocking ... to behold the king of the universe unable to turn over on his back without assistance, utterly dependent upon the kindness of his creatures.'

To be called into relationship with God and each other is to risk pain. It is risky to be open with one another in the same

way it was risky for God to open to us in Christ's birth. In thi Epiphany season contemplat the journey that the birth of Jesu started for Mary, for the shep herds, the kings, the disciples Where would this encounte with God lead? This Epiphan contemplate the journey that you are on. Is your journey risk enough? Do you always fee safe? As followers of Jesus w claim that God walks with us in all of the dark places; remembe the psalm: "Though I walk in th valley of the shadow of death fear no evil; for you are with me."

Perhaps being in the "valley of the shadow" is not a place we mistakenly find ourselves and then take comfort in God's presence with us — like taking a wrong turn into a bad neighborhood. First we find comfort in God's presence, then we willing ly make ourselves vulnerable by stepping into life's challenges risk our beloved security, and so become a vulnerable servant of the vulnerable servant — Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Andrew Thayer
 St. Bartholomew's
 Corpus Christi, Texa

Hurry Up! It's Advent!

f It was late September and f Iwas in the K-Mart, looking for a small wheelbarrow and a few fall gardening supplies. I headed back to the corner of the store where the Garden Shop had been located all spring and summer. As I rounded the corner by the shampoo and toothpaste aisles, expecting the usual display of rakes, hoses, garden tools and the like, I was confronted by a team of store employees erecting a winter wonderland of artificial Christmas trees, inflatable snowmen and Santas, and shelves full of ornaments, tinsel and lights. It was late September! The Garden Shop had become the North Pole and Santa's Wonderland!

It's that time of year when "The Holidays" are launched. A television wit observed that we really should declare the time from October 31 through January 1 as one extended holiday called "Hallowthankmas-year." He has a point. Halloween is over; Thanksgiving is just around the corner; and, it's full speed ahead to Christmas. Messianic expectation and the birth of our Savior seem to hold a pale second place

to holiday sales forecasts and consumer confidence indices.

The season preceding Christmas, known as Advent, is to be a time of preparation, both inwardly and outwardly, for the awaited second coming of Christ as well as for the celebration of God's incarnation in Jesus. We are encouraged to "slow down and be quiet." A fine idea and a necessary undertaking to be sure.

If ever there was a need to contemplate, more than superficially, the meaning of God in Christ being born and coming into our lives, it is in this tumultuous and troubled day and age. But the reality in our culture, and in the Church, is that this season is filled to the brim with preparations, activities, and commitments most of which are for very good purposes. There are rehearsals for plays and pageants, Lessons and Carols, and glorious worship services. There are preparations for our Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday meals for those in need. There is our toy drive, and our hat and scarf collection for children and adults who have so little in their lives. There is our Christmas Festival and other wonderful gatherings that bless and strengthen our

parish community. I'd like to slow down and be quiet, but "time's a wastin'!"

Actually, if one takes a look at the Holy Scriptures appointed for Advent, there is a great deal of urgency and haste, and precious little peace and quiet to be found. We begin with a "voice crying out (not whispering) in the wilderness," calling all to repentance with a sense of immediacy. We are told to watch, with fervent expectation, "for we know not when the Lord will come." Even Mary, pregnant with Jesus, hastens to visit her cousin Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, so that they can rejoice together at what God is doing in and through them. Everyone in the Bible passages for Advent is gripped with sense of imminence and urgency. And so, I propose that we adopt a new mantra for this season: "Hurry up! Quick! It's Advent!"

Time is short! Don't delay! In the days between now and Christmas be quick to forgive and slow to anger. Don't wait to be kind, generous, and giving. Pray immediately, and more not less! Hasten to love everyone, especially those hardest to love. Maybe there can

be a way, in the midst of all our busyness, to be equally busy ir getting ready for God to be a rea part of our lives and not just ar ornamental display, here for "Hallowthankmas-year" and ther packed away 'til next year.

May you have a blessed and fruitful Advent.

The Rev. James L. Burns
 Church of the Heavenly Rest
 New York, New York

Lead Me Safely

God of the Mountains God of the Sea God of Glory Maker of me

God of the Sunshine God of the Rain God of all Comfort God of Pain

Lead me safely through my valley
'Til I reach the other height Hold my hand within the shadow

'Til I stand immersed in Light.

 Dorothy Knapp Millbrook, New York

CREAM OF THE CROP



The Anglican Book Club winter selection is All the People in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture by Richard Losch.



"Born to be battered ... the loving phone call book. Underline it, circle things, write in the margins, turn down page corners, the more you use it, the more valuable it gets to be."

So reads an old advertisement by the South Central Bell Telephone Company which illustrates well what our approach to the Bible should be.

All the People in the Bible was written with the express purpose of helping us better understand more of the characters in Scripture. Giving special attention to the "lesser characters of the Bible," this book also serves as a valuable and readable Scriptural resource, and witnesses well to the seasoned ministry of the retired Episcopal rector who is its author. — KSH+

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FIFTY YEARS of ANGELS

These are the angels our readers have honored at the 50th year of THE ANGLICAN DIGEST'S ministry to the Church.

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Christian Year

Here we are in November with Advent a stone's throw away Are we ready for another round? I mean another round of the Christian Year.

John Keble wrote a beautifu book of poetry called The Christian Year. I remember Father Tanghe having a first edition copy of which he was very proud. Keble wrote a poetic "round" of devotion and theology which, as it encompassed the whole Christian Calendar encompassed and embodied too the whole Christian story. This book was part of the literature of the Oxford Movement which formed a basis for so much of our own rich tradition.

The sequence of Sundays and Feast Days that begins on Advent Sunday is the whole story of God's mighty acts. As the Prayer Book puts it, "We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son. For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world. In him, you have delivered us

from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life. "(BCP p.368)

On Advent Sunday we begin again the journey through the weeks and months of our Christian story. We have ups and downs, light and dark, joy and sadness, sin and forgiveness, questions and answers. There are short, sharp periods like Advent and Lent, intense periods like Holy Week followed by the glorious 50 days of Easter, and long reflective periods like "after Pentecost" culminating in the festivals of Thanksgiving and of Christ the King. Join this journey. Don't just think of church as Sunday after Sunday. Think of it as a story that unfolds. Anticipate the next installment. Look for the colors and the melodies that express a change of mood - a change of meaning. This story is rich in symbolism and in metaphor. This is a story of God's sacramental presence amongst us. The story is told in scripture, in preaching, in liturgy and music, and above all in the orayerful dialogue we hold with he Divine Master who made this plan for us to follow in time and space. Join one another and, like

the travelers on the road to Emmaus, discuss the events you witness. Then hear him open it to you so that you say like them "did not our hearts burn within us?"

"O watch and pray ere Advent dawn!

For thinner than the subtlest lawn

Twixt thee and death the veil is drawn.

But Love too late can never glow: The scatter'd fragments Love can glean,

Refine the dregs, and yield us

To regions where one thought serene

Breathes sweeter than whole years of sacrifice below."

John Keble, 1827, "The Christian Year – Sunday next before Advent"

 The Rev. John Bolton, Church of Our Saviour, Atlanta, Georgia

Society of King Charles the Martyr Annual Mass

11 a.m. Saturday 31 January 2009 Music of Charpentier and Tomkins

The Rev'd F. Washington Jarvis, Preacher
S. Stephen's Church

114 George St., Providence RI 02906 Luncheon reservations \$15 by 20 January to Church office, note SKCM Luncheon Society inquiries: www.skcm-usa.org



Wyoming

Guide, O Lord, the feet that seek to follow in the trail of Thy bright passing: on burnished peaks of light, or scoured beds of rushing water, and quietly by the sheltering folds of sheep. In wide places and in small, haste Thy blessing upon the Wyoming land, that her people faithful be, their lives attuned to Thy gracious splendor upon the buttes and grassy pasture, the wooded home of elk or bear, and the hearths of human

friendship
at the ending of the trail;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

The Garden of Eden

This reflection began back in the Garden of Eden. It began as a springboard for a reflection on five central qualities of the Benedictine life, but rapidly took on a life of its own, catapulting me not into Benedict, but into the words of the "J" writer who profoundly reveals the heart of God.

It all began, as I said, back in the Garden of Eden, in a parkland "planted" by God to be, as its name suggests, a place of delight, enchantment, and pleasure. The story that unfolds there is foundational for understanding human nature and the course of human history and provides the basic material for every Oscar and Grammy. It is a story that plays itself out in four scenes:-

I: Genesis 2:4b-17 Placing Adam in the garden II: Genesis 2:18-25

Creating a partner for Adam

III: Genesis 3:1-7

Disruption in the garden

IV: Genesis 3:8-24

Expulsion from the garden

Although each scene is interrelated, Scenes I and IV clearly belong together; the first describes human entry into the garden, the fourth describes the leaving of the garden. Similarly, Scenes II and III belong together. One describes the establishment of community; the other, its violation. Together they form the setting in which the human relationship with God is lived out and it would be fun if time and space permitted to explore the story in full. However, I want to focus on three verses which are often overlooked and seen only as background to the drama that unfolds.

Genesis 2:15 Man is placed in the garden and given responsibility for it;

Genesis 2:16 Man is given free reign over everything in the garden; and,

Genesis 2:17 Man is forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Those verses form the basis for human life in God's world, each highlighting one aspect of that life — vocation, promise, and

prohibition.

It begins with vocation. Adam is to "till and tend" the garden; words that evoke images of gardening and shepherding. It is, I think, telling that what here belongs together separates and becomes the source of conflict in the story of Cain and Abel. But the point I want to make is that,

Work, therefore, is not punishment, nor is it the enemy of the spiritual life, a drudgery to be endured in order to be able to live and enjoy life. Work is intrinsic to God's plan for us and at the heart of God's purpose for our lives. Much in our western culture has distorted and robbed work of its true meaning, and done untold damage to humans in the process, but work itself is a holy thing, for it is a sharing in the work of God. As such, work is, perhaps, the most spiritual of all activity, the most sanctifying thing we can ever do. Our calling is to treasure and nurture all that God has so graciously entrusted to us and, in the process, to make the world what God intended it to be. We live in a world obsessed with status, position, and power. Our world rewards people out of all proportion to the contribution

before disobedience becomes

part of the story, work exists.

We live in a world obsessed with status, position, and power. Our world rewards people out of all proportion to the contribution made. Worth is measured not in terms of worldly rewards but rather in the indescribable privilege of our calling to share in the work of God and to participate in what God is doing in the world. All life is vocation — a living out of the call to "till and

tend" creation. However lowly our position in worldly terms however unimportant what we do may seem to be, our work in the community, in our home, and at our place of employment is entrusted to us by God. The mystery of grace is such that it is often the lowliest jobs in the eyes of the world that are greatest in the kingdom of God.

The gift of Eve as "helper" and "partner" for Adam introduces a new element of vocation. It is no good for the man to be alone Vocation is lived out in partner ship, in a duality that is a unity and that reflects in its very essence and being, the wonder ful mystery of the "spiritua unity between Christ and his Church." Vocation is lived out in partnership and the partnership itself becomes vocation. Tha new aspect of vocation is material for a meditation of its own.

Our vocation, both to "till and to tend" and as "helper and partner," is worked out, says the story, in the context of both promise and prohibition. It is, think, telling that the popular understanding of the story focuses on prohibition rather than per-

mission. The two belong together and whenever one is held above the other perspective is distorted and human life is skewed either into legalism or licentiousness.

The garden is a place of God's abundant providence and blessing. Everything is gift and cause for wonder and celebration. Everything is permitted and a source of ongoing delight and pleasure. But there are always boundaries, and the garden is bounded by one prohibition. The story does not explain the prohibition for the prohibition in and of itself is unimportant. What is important is the authority of the one who speaks and the expectation of an absolute obedience that is born of trust. This is God's world and we live in it on God's terms.

The conversation that comes later between the woman and the serpent is fascinating. The prohibition is interrogated and challenged, and what is a given is reduced to an option. In the process, what was boundary becomes threat, promise is obscured, and what was trust becomes defiance. In his commentary on Genesis, Walter

Brueggemann rather scathingly says, "Theological-ethical talk here is not to serve God, but to avoid the claims of God. . . . The serpent is the first in the Bible to seem knowing and critical about God and to practice theology in the place of obedience."

I wonder how often we "practice theology in place of obedience?" How often do we use it to avoid the claims of God on our life? When the prohibition is violated in the garden, the promises are perverted and vocation is undermined. The energy once spent in "tilling and tending" God's creation is now focussed entirely on the self and its new-found freedom that is not freedom but bondage.

Vocation, promise, prohibition are three strands of human life lived in God's world on God's terms, interdependent facets of divine purpose. They must be prayerfully woven into a three-fold cord that is not easily broken and can sustain us in our ministry. All life is vocation.

May the three-fold cord of your life be renewed this Advent and Christmas.

 The Rt. Rev. Brian Germond, Johannesburg, South Africa

Golden Anniversary Celebration October 22, 2008

On a windy fall day, the family and friends of THE ANGLICAN DIGEST gathered at Hillspeak in the Ozarks of Northwest Arkansas to offer thanks to God for fifty years of blessing and to renew our commitment to serve the world-wide Anglican Communion with this little magazine.



SPEAK Board of Trustees

Bishops Ed Salmor and John Buchanan Dr. Mitch Singleton the Rev. Chris Colby and Mr. William Atwood as well as the Trustees' Warder along with the Rev Kendall Harmon and Mr. Tom Walker are pictured. Three members of the Board were unable to

attend: Ann Cady Scott, Bishop Gethin Hughes, and Bishop Johr Bauerschmidt.

Bishop Anthony Burton, rector of Church of the Incarnation, Dallas, Texas, was our keynote speaker, recalling the ways in which TAD has ministered to the Anglican Church over the last 50 years and encouraging a renewed commitment to that ministry for the future.



Friends — many associated with TAD from its earliest days — gathered to join in worship and remembrance of past editors and Board members. Kendall Harmon and Bishop Burton gave inspired (and inspiring) talks.





The regular staff, whose efforts were recognized, joined in the celebration, visited with our guests, and enjoyed a picnic lunch of fried chicken and the "fixin's".

Picnic baskets created the feel of "dinner on the grounds" as we relished a bit of reminiscing.





Thanks to all who support us with their prayers, their financial gifts, those who volunteer their time and talent — we look forward to another 50 years!



HILLSPEAKING

THE SEASONS of the Church Year set the tasks and pace for the Hillspeak work force. They revolve around the mailing of THE ANGLICAN DIGEST (TAD) which, in turn, depends upon the date of Easter Day.

Two issue dates are fixed: the Feast of the Transfiguration (6 August) and Michaelmas (29 September), but the other four can vary as much as from 22 March to 24 April for the Easter issue alone. The remaining three will vary according to the Church Year dates of Ash Wednesday, the Day of Pentecost and Advent Sunday.

Generally speaking, TAD's mailing date is roughly thirty days before the issue date, e.g., the Transfiguration TAD will be mailed on or about 6 July whether the Pentecost has been mailed in April or May.

Whether the time between TAD mailings is thirty days or forty-five days, that time must be used to mail ANGLICAN BOOK CLUB selections, orders from THE ANGLICAN BOOKSTORE, correspondence and — almost daily

 books to or from OPERATION PASS ALONG. Twiddling-fingers time is in short supply.

Tnasmuch as TAD is published Lby a very small staff consisting, in the main, of an editor and managing editor, the lead time for material for the magazine, for the most part, is prepared in the season or seasons preceding the issue scheduled. As an example, the material, including this "Hillspeaking", for the Advent issue is being prepared during late Transfiguration and early Michaelmas. And the comments being received are most likely about the Transfiguration or earlier issues. It does make for a bit of confusion from time to time.

If one is working on Advent it must be August. To paraphrase the Preacher, "There is at Hillspeak time to be busy, very busy; and time, not to be idle, but less busy."

At any season, come visit. Just don't ask what season it is.

- The Trustees' Warden

Greet the Unexpected

As I write this, I am prepared to make one forecast with absolute confidence: in the next twelve months much will happen to us and to our world that will be totally unexpected. It was that, not very original but curiously neglected, thought that drew me to one of my most quoted texts from Philippians.

"I am ready for anything through the strength of the one Who lives within me" (Phillips Trans. 4:13).

Note that it didn't say, "I can do all things " Paul was not bragging about what he could do, but confiding the secret of how to greet the unexpected: "I am ready for anything — I can take it."

Over the centuries we have been battling to protect ourselves from the unexpected. Every society has produced its crop of fortune-tellers and palm readers. They're still in business. Not even the most brilliant diplomat or historian has any inside information as to what will happen in this field. If we listen to too much advice, we wind up making other peoples' mistakes. There are no iron-clad rules that govern

the future except the will of God to which we appeal every time we say, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done."

he Bible is not a code-book containing mysterious predictions as to the immediate future. Rather, what I find in the Bible is the celebration of the unexpected. For example, the New Testament opens with the advent of the unexpected Messiah unexpected at that moment and in that place. Anna and Simeon - ready for anything and praying for the coming Messiah, suddenly are confronted with a child in their arms — vulnerable and helpless, born in a manger and pursued by Herod. When Jesus grew up and launched his ministry, was there anything more unpredictable? He walked away from the so-called "righteous" and socialized with the so-called "sinners." When he was expected to preach sermons, he told funny stories. When he was expected to be the strong comforter at a friend's funeral, "Jesus wept." And when he was expected to be weak and trembling before Pilate, he looked him in the eye until Pilate turned away in embarrassment. And what would have been more unexpected than a crucified Messiah rising from the dead?

The gospel that flowed from this extraordinary intervention of God in human affairs had the most unpredictable success in the Roman world. How did it happen? The Christian answer is that it happened because men and women found in the gospel of Christ an inner strength to meet the trials and overcome the temptations of life in a time that was as chaotic as ours.

o be a Christian is to be humble enough to know that we need such a power beyond ourselves and beyond any mortal aid. The first day of a new year is a good time to remember that such reliance on the indwelling Christ is not something to keep in store for emergencies only. It is for now, since the unexpected can arrive at any moment. To be ready for anything requires that we make space in these crowded hours each day for prayer, that we seek regular refreshment in worship with our fellow Christians, that we practice the presence of Christ in unexpected places and at all possible times.

The Rev. Dr. Craig Kallio,
 St. Stephen's,
 Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Adoption and Grace

We owe a great deal to St. Paul. He spent a life-time struggling to put into human terms the most profound truths and inexplicable mysteries of God's saving love. It was by no means an easy task. Those who made up the membership of the early Christian churches were a mixed lot - traditional Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah foretold by the scriptures; sophisticated Greeks who were attracted by the innovative teaching of the Apostles; simple followers newly transformed from a life of pagan practices by the witness of those who proclaimed and lived the Gospel. How could Paul convey to such a varied group the enormity of what God had done for them in Christ?

A powerful concept he discovered was something we hear many times in our readings in Epiphany, and especially in the service of Holy Baptism: Adoption. "God has made us his children by adoption and grace." It was a wonderful way to describe God's action, as well as the basis for each Christian's new relationship with Christ. They all knew what it meant.

The Jewish Christians were familiar with adoption. The story of their journey as the people of God was replete with many examples of being chosen. Moses was "adopted" by Pharaoh's daughter when she found his infant cradle in the bull-rushes. The lovely book of Esther told how that faith-filled lady was adopted by the holy man, Mordechai. Adoption was part of Hebrew tradition - not exactly in our modern legal sense - but the moral expectations were explicit that when a family member or a neighbor died, leaving children orphaned, they were to be raised as one's own off-spring.

The newly converted Greek and pagan Christians understood adoption in a similar way. It was a common legal custom, regulated by the careful codes by which the Romans ran their world. A baby could be adopted at birth. A trusted slave could be adopted

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and treated as a freeman. An orphan or foster-child could be taken into a family. In each case an irrevocable relationship was established; the adopted baby or person was entitled to the family name and could claim all the rights, privileges and inheritances due to any member of that household.

Adoption. That, said St. Paul, is what it means to belong to God, and he used it several times in his Epistles. But most of all Paul used the language of adoption to explain what happens at Baptism. Through Baptism we become part of God's family. We are named as God's children. We are given "Christian" names. We are entitled to enjoy all the privileges that God's children enjoy. We are made God's Children by adoption and grace.

This beautiful concept is reflected in the prayer on Page 311 of our Prayer Book:

All praise and thanks to you, most merciful Father, for adopting us as your children, for incorporating us into your Holy Church, and for making us worthy to share in the inheritance of the saints in light; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rt. Rev. Gethin B.
 Hughes, via St. Mark's
 Cathedral, Shreveport, Louisiana

St. Nicholas, the Patron Saint of Children

On December 6, the Church remembers Nicholas. famous saint of old. We all know him as St. Nicholas. He is otherwise known as Santa Claus. First, we do not know much about St. Nicholas, except he was Bishop of Myra, and lived in the 300s A.D. We also know he suffered torture and endured imprisonment under the Roman emperor Diocletian during a time of persecution. Eventually he attended the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. In later centuries Nicholas was honored as a saint and he became well-known throughout the West. Nicholas is the patron saint of seafarers and sailors.

But he is best known as the patron Saint of all children. It became tradition that on December 6, Nicholas would bring gifts to children (hence the beginning of Santa Claus in later centuries). His symbol is often three bags of gold, representing three young girls he saved from dishonor.

St. Nicholas' godly life reminds us in the Advent season of Jesus' words in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10: "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

There is nothing more precious in this world than new life, the innocent, the children. And there is no better image of this than Jesus holding the little ones in his arms and blessing them. It does not matter if you are two feet high or six feet tall, Jesus is ready to hold you in his arms. He holds you and me and blesses us. We are to approach our Lord and Father with a child-like heart, believing and trusting in his never-failing love and care.

This time of the year we prepare for that holy arrival of the Christ Child who is the very Kingdom of God set right before our eyes! May the hope and joy in God be with you all the rest of this Advent season. Amen!

The Rev. James L. Pahl, Jr.,
 St. James',
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₩ DEATHS ₩

THE REV. LANGFORD BALDWIN, 91, in Worcester, Massachusetts. A graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary, he was ordained in 1951. During his ministry, he served at St. Barnabas, Ardsley, New York; St. Andrew's, New Bedford, Massachusetts; St. Barnabas & All Saints, Springfield; and, at Grace, Amherst. He retired in 1977.

* The Rev. Philip Clough Bentley, 89, in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. A graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary, he was ordained in 1943 and joined the US Navy as chaplain, a post in which he served until 1967. He then served parishes in Virginia and Florida until retiring in 1986. He was also a chaplain at the VA Medical Center in West Palm Beach and was active in Cursillo and Kairos.

THE REV. ROBERT D. HERZOG, 74, in Severna Park, Maryland. A graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary, he was ordained in 1964 in the Diocese of Washington and served there and in the Diocese of Maryland until retiring in 1999.

* The Rev. J. David McCallum, 83, in Tomah, Wisconsin. A graduate of Philadelphia Divinity School, he was ordained in 1953. He served parishes in the Dioceses of Kansas, West Missouri, and Wisconsin. He was a missionary to the Mosquito Indians in Nicaragua for 14 years. He retired in 1997. Fr. McCallum was also an associate of the Order of the Holy Cross.

* The Rev. Haig Joseph Nargesian, 85, in Northport, Connecticut. A graduate of the General Theological Seminary, he was ordained in 1948 and served parishes in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Maine until retiring in 1988. Active in diocesan affairs in both Connecticut and Maine, he was also an associate of the Community of St. Mary, Eastern Province.

THE REV. WILLIAM PAYTON, 67, in Atlanta, Georgia. A graduate of the General Theological Seminary, he was ordained a deacon in 1965 and a priest in 1966 in the Diocese of Georgia. He served parishes in Georgia, Rhode Island, and Maryland before retiring in 2003.

* The Rev. MICHAEL SPILLANE, 58, in Menlo Park, California. A native of England and a graduate of St. Patrick's Theological Seminary in Canada, Fr. Spillane was received from the Roman Catholic Church and ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church in 1992. He served several parishes in the Diocese of Idaho before being called to Holy Trinity in Menlo Park as rector in 2007. He was a chaplain in the Order of St. Luke.

Rest eternal, grant unto them O Lord, and let light-perpetual shine upon them.

Advent Prayer

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day. We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us. We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom. We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence. We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!" Amen

- Henri J. M. Nouwen



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Season of Epiphany

'Tis the season of Epiphany, fa, la, la, la, la . . . I know, no one ever sings that song but maybe we're missing an opportunity. For me, Epiphany is just not given its due. It's sandwiched in between Christmas and Lent like a piece of wilted lettuce. After the tumult of the holidays, we all need a settling period, and let's face it — the six days between Christmas and New Year's just isn't enough time to recover and make a resolution that is lasting.

So if we're really going to make a change, shouldn't we look at the Magi a bit more thoughtfully? Those who followed the star to Bethlehem and discovered God in the humblest of circumstances twelve days after his birth were changed forever. Their trip home no doubt took some time — they "went home by another road."

What might our new way look like? The gospels during these four weeks recount Jesus' baptism and the disciples who turned from what they were doing and followed. I don't know about you but I could certainly benefit from reexamining my Baptismal Covenant and taking a metaphorical new path.

If I were to grade myself on keeping that most essential of covenants, I might deserve something along the lines of a Boon proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. As for seeking to serve Christ in all persons, loving myneighbor as myself, that could definitely use some work. And striving for justice and peace among all people, and respecting the dignity of every human being, well that's a tall order.

Just how am I going to turn this into an epiphanous month? Maybe one way is to start by asking for God's help, listening to the answers that are all around me, all around us, and then reacting. If I were to ask, listen, and then respond, it seems doable. I'm willing to bet that if I could there would be lots of epiphanies, lots of resplendent moments, and the star of wonder, star of light would guide me closer to its perfect light.

May your Season of Epiphany be filled with resplendence and your path illuminated by the yonder star.

Cece Fowler,
 Christ Church Cathedral,
 Houston, Texas

The Counter-Revolution Luke 2:15-20

We had plans for every possible attack and counter attack. We had plotted and planned, for centuries really, until every eventuality had been carefully called into account. We knew how every possible move He could make could be thwarted. Yet, we never saw it coming.

But I get ahead of myself. Best to go back to the beginning. It started when our leader, Lucifer, led a revolt against God. We were cast down, for the time being, but Lucifer had a plan and while we had lost the battle, the revolution had begun. We could win the war for heaven and earth. We just needed to wait and watch, for the

right time.

Sin came into the world effort-lessly enough. It only took a single choice to get humans to turn away from God. It didn't matter that the choice was the knowledge of Good and Evil, it could have been the knowledge of where to get the perfect Cappuccino. Ask a human to deny his or herself a choice and soon enough they will do the very thing that is forbidden.

And so humans learned to turn away from God. But we knew that was not the end of the matter. for God cared for the miserable little creatures so much that he kept working at it. God sent prophets and kept sending them. It was all too easy to get those whiners put to death. You don't even need to dispatch a demon to sit on someone's shoulder for a job like that. Try to disturb the status quo and soon enough you'll pay. And the prophets were made to pay. Isaiah might have instilled hope in humanity for a time, but he was sawn in two in a hollow log. Then up would pop another prophet, like Zechariah who was slain in the Temple of all places. Again and again the prophets called on the people to turn back to God. Some people would listen, while others would kill the prophet.

This is when we started running all the scenarios, playing them out in the minutest detail. We knew the prophecies better than any Hebrew scholar. But we never saw the bigger picture. We knew the Messiah would be born to a Virgin. We knew he would be a descendant of David. We knew to look in Bethlehem. We knew it all. But the piece of the puzzle that we never comprehended was that that baby boy would be God.

Not like God, not some adopt-

ed child of God, but God. That infant wrapped in swaddling clothes in a Bethlehem stable was the fullness of the Trinity. God become human. Incomprehensible. Emmanuel—God with us. Who would have ever thought that God had really meant that literally? Hah! The maker of all that is enters into the creation itself. We never would have done that. Lucifer himself would have never deigned to have anything to do with creation if he could have helped it.

It was an elegantly simple approach in retrospect. There was a problem within creation and so God entered the creation to repair the fabric of the cosmos from the

inside.

But come on. How could we expect such an attack on the way of the world? Why would God care so much? Why would God bother? That question is the one I've never gotten my mind around. And yet, it happened. Incomprehensible or not, it happened.

Of course, we thought it meant our victory was assured. We were cocky in those days. With God made man, we only had to snuff out the God-Man Jesus. Herod nearly pulled it off too, in killing all the babies around Bethlehem.

Weakling, he should have killed every baby they could find anywhere. Didn't he understand what was at stake? No, of course not. Like most of them, he could not see beyond his own power, his own interests. Herod never saw the larger picture.

But we knew in time that Jesus would be brought down. It was as inevitable as the death of any other prophet. Becoming God among humans would naturally mean a lot of people would want him dead before too long. And eventually it happened. On that battered hilltop called Golgotha—the place of a skull—he died without his closest followers, abandoned it seemed by God and man.

Oh how we celebrated that Friday. And on the Saturday we thought would never end, we rejoiced. God had played the final hand and we were holding all the aces.

By Sunday, we knew the truth. The death of Jesus was not the end. The death of Jesus was the beginning of a counter-revolution against the way of the world—our ways. Jesus' resurrection turned the whole world upside down. The most degraded of victims became the ultimate victor.

We had revolted against God and Heaven. But now with Jesus, the last became the first. The humble was exalted. It was everything he had babbled on about for three years made visible. The counter-revolution had begun.

Well, maybe not exactly. The problem was that the counter-revolution really started that night in Bethlehem. A poor mother, a hapless stepfather, and some grubby shepherds crouched round the maker of heaven and earth. The birth of that one baby in a stable in Bethlehem was like wrenching loose the cornerstone. Sooner or later our great plans for humanity's destruction would come crashing down. That baby changed everything.

Emmanuel—God with us. Amazing. And God remains with

them still. Even now.

We've already lost. We don't talk about it. But we know. Now it's only a matter of time. You've read the final book, you've seen the last reel. Good wins. Evil loses. Over and over again. But, how could we have known? We never saw it coming.

 The Rev. Frank Logue, King of Peace, Kingsland, Georgia

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Blessed Hope

I listened recently to a clergyman (no one I knew) speaking on the theme of hope: a great theme, and he knew how to talk. It became apparent, however, that the more he talked the less he was saying. In particular I was struck by what he managed not to say: what we might hope for, and what we should hope in. His was a vague, generic hope, without any actual content, and without any actual foundation: which is to say, not hope at all, just bland reassurance.

The question of hope is one of the great themes of this Advent season, as it is of human life as a whole. What may we hope for? And what may we hope in? And how do we lay hold of this hope? One of Thomas Hardy's poems, "The darkling thrush", leads us into these questions. It opens with the poet in "bleak mid-winter," leaning upon "a coppice-gate/ When Frost was spectre-gray,/ And Winter's dregs made desolate/ The weakening eye of day." In the tangle of dead vines, the poet sees "strings of broken lyres," the traditional symbol of death's victory over poetry itself. One is inevitably reminded by theme and rhyme with "lyres" of "bare ruined choirs/where late the sweet birds sang". The theme is one as old as poetry itself: in nature's annual dying and the inevitable, irrevocable passage of time (the poem is dated 1900), he sees the defeat of the human spirit.

The land's sharp features seemed to be The Century's corpse outleant, His crypt the cloudy canopy, The wind his death lament.

For Christian faith, midwinter is a time to celebrate the new birth given to us by the one born in Bethlehem; a time to prepare for the Lord's coming with souls fervent with the fire of the Spirit (the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, Matthew 25:1-13). Not so for the poet.

The ancient pulse of germ and birth Was shrunken hard and dry, And every spirit upon earth Seemed fervourless as I.

It is perhaps illuminating to recall that in 1900 Hardy was sixty years old, enduring an unhappy marriage, and, after the savage critical response to *Jude the Obscure*, had given up writing novels. His first collection of poetry, published in 1898, had been received without enthusiasm. His own prospects may have seemed rather bleak.

 Υ et in this landscape of inevitable death and defeat both natural and human, something inexplicable happens.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-throated evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

Himself an "aged thrush" the poet may well have wondered what this bird has to sing about. With no "household fires" to warm him, winter may mean death. As the allusion to "evensong" suggest, his song is a kind of *Nunc Dimittis*, the song of aged Simeon as he goes to his death (Luke 2: 29-32).

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

In this "ecstatic sound" he hears the fervor of spirit which nature's dying gives no reason for. Something more than "terrestrial" must explain this "joy illimited." Perhaps there was "some blessed Hope whereof he knew/And I was unaware." The phrase "blessed Hope" comes from the Prayer Book's collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, and is the final, unmistakable hint of the poet's meaning.

The poet sees that Hope cannot be hope for, or hope in, "terrestrial things," which must inevitably pass away. For hope to be hope — a sure and certain expectation, which no winter can chill — it must first, be hope for God — who is the "joy illimited" above all "terrestrial things." Second, hope must be established in God, in confidence of his power — that most "ancient pulse of germ and birth", the Ancient of Days, whose eternal son is born of a Virgin to regenerate us in the fervor of the Spirit. Thirdly, hope must be known, and known through God's revealing of it to us. I don't know what Hardy's religious views were, but on the evidence of this poem, would guess he was a reluctant agnostic, who could long for this "blessed Hope" but was unable to know its certainty. He leans on the "coppice-gate", and listens wonderingly and wistfully to the thrush's song; but does not go through.

The poet has brought us thus far. At the Advent gate of the Christian year, he has tuned our ears to the thrush's wordless "carolings." For us to go through this gate, we must hear and receive the words which the Church's faith supplies for this music, words which are found in all the carols and hymns of this season. Insistently and joyously do these holy words declare the Advent of Hope into the world. For the Word of Hope has been made flesh, and born of Mary, for us "to embrace and ever hold fast" with all the powers of our mind and will.

 The Rev. Gavin G. Dunbar, Saint John's, Savannah, Georgia

Your Questions, My Questions

After reading the Rev. Frederick W. Schmidt's book, What God Wants for Your Life, * I thought it might be worthwhile to consider the question Fr. Schmidt's book title posits. What does God want for our lives? Fr. Schmidt teaches that we cannot know what God wants for our lives until we are willing to be open to and available to God.

The basic problem we all face is egocentricity. This is not a sin; it is a natural condition. We all are more aware of our own wants and needs before we become aware of the wants and needs of others. Thinking of ourselves first is a way we assure our survival in a dangerous world. However, Fr. Schmidt suggests, if we are to ever truly understand our true needs and destination, we must turn the questions around to, "What does God want for us?" This too may seem egocentric on the surface, but if the question is asked carefully we will know the answer in a proader sense beyond our internal reasoning.

What I mean is that the question should be, "How does God work in me despite my wish to put me first?" It seems that when we address God we are mostly seeking God's favor, God's support, and God's magic.

Certainly, most of us don't believe that God works magic, but we do believe that God works miracles, which we often confuse with magic. What I mean by that is we go to God with a particular problem (maybe we have been diagnosed with a life threatening illness) and we ask God to work magic for us and take the illness away. Instead, to be more closely in tune with God, we are to ask God to use the illness or other problem as a method of demonstrating God's love for all of humanity.

Praying for health and healing is not wrong, but we must use Jesus' example of seeking God to relieve us of a terrible burden. Recall, while Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and fully cognizant of what was to come next, he prayed that the burden he was about to face

Frederick W. Schmidt, What God Wants for Your Life, 2005, Harper San Francisco.

could be lifted from him. We could suggest that at that moment Jesus was experiencing doubt. He may have even doubted his mission and purpose in life. Nonetheless, he submitted to God's will and completed his mession.

Fr. Schmidt suggests that the questions we ask are all too often what he refers to as "I- questions." What he means by that is that what we want is more important than what God intends or what God wants for us.

The idea is that we think of God in far too small a way. To be attuned to the "God-questions," as Fr. Schmidt calls them, is to see or to understand God in a larger context than ourselves. The basic issue is one of culture. We live in a culture that is "I-centered." The opposite, of course, is a culture that is "God-centered." We may not be able to build a God-centered culture, but we can develop a God-centered life. What would a God-centered life be like?

Possibly it can be built on a question that asks, "What can God do through me?" We cannot ask the "through me" question

until we recognize that we cannot compartmentalize our lives, separating our lives by function. In a work place I might behave a way that is totally different than when in a social environment. Certainly, work skills and tasks require us to do things we would not do in another place, but what I am addressing is attitude, persona, or image.

To be God-centered and to be willing to ask the God-questions is to recognize that God is not compartmentalized. God is ever present in life and in every aspect of life. This requires us to be ever constant that what we say or do reflects our relationship with God.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that we must live like cloistered monks or nuns. What I am thinking about is how we reflect in our lives the reality of God. That means we address people with civility, we are prepared to forego our egos for the good of others, and we understand that God is found in the other as well as in ourselves.

The ultimate reality is that God is not in a box. God is not inside the church building waiting for

us to return or not next Sunday to worship God. God is in life. God is in our lives and in the lives of all of humanity. Ask the God-question, "What does God want done to make the world a better place?" When we ask that question the power of God to change the world becomes evident in us.

Thus, moving out of ourselves, our egos, is the beginning of a full and hopeful life. Settling for just the BIG-I is not satisfying. Much of what we think of as life is unrewarding, mundane, and spiritless. But, when we open our minds, our hearts, and our very being to becoming God's agents, seeking to discern what God wants done, we begin to understand what Jesus meant that he has come to give us an abundant life.

Unless we allow for the Godquestion, writes Fr. Schmidt, your question, my question, and our questions are thin and hopeless. It is God who gives substance to the questions of life.

- The Rev. William F.
Bellais, Ed.D.,
Grace Church,
Chillicothe, Missouri

Americanized Christmas

As a holy day on the Church calendar, Christmas is a latecomer. One of the early Church leaders, Clement of Alexandria, suggested May 20 as the most likely day for the actual birth of Jesus, but it wasn't a celebrated occasion. The earliest mention of December 25 as the Nativity of our Lord dates to the year 336.

In the Eastern Church, January 6 commemorated the baptism of Jesus as well as the Epiphany and was considered more important than Christmas. By the fifth century most of the Christian world observed December 25 as the day of Jesus' birth. The Church in Jerusalem held on to January 6 until 549, which is interesting considering that the Church of the Nativity, where the event supposedly took place, was already in existence in Bethlehem.

The secular side of Christmas was even slower to develop and some of what we think of as Christmas "traditions" are downright modern. The celebration was always marked by merrymaking but a lot of modern Christmas customs are influenced by Charles Dickens.

In 1809 Washington Irving

published a History of New York, which was meant to be a spoof of Dutch culture. In it, Santa Claus lost his bishop's apparel and appeared as a bearded Dutch sailor with a pipe and a long green coat. Santa Claus as we know him didn't appear until Clement Moore's poem, A Visit From Saint Nicholas (better known as The Night Before Christmas) was published in the Troy, New York Sentinel on December 23, 1823. For the first time the eight flying reindeer were given names.

In 1863 Thomas Nast (a political cartoonist who gave us the Republican Party elephant, the Democratic Party donkey, and Uncle Sam) drew the first picture of a portly Santa Claus. Until then he had been tall and thin. Even then it wasn't until 1885 that the red suit became standardized. Some have suggested that Coca-Cola advertising invented the red and white suit. That isn't true, but there is no doubt that Coca-Cola marketing cemented the costume of Santa Claus forever.

It is a mixture of the sacred and the secular, the holy and the ordinary. And maybe that isn't all bad. Maybe that has a lot to say about the nature of this wonderful and magical holiday that has captured the imagination of generation after generation. To be sure, Christmas can be overwhelmed by all the hoopla that surrounds it. Sometimes — maybe even a lot of the time — the commercial side of things seems to be out of balance. For some I suppose the season is mostly about Santa Claus and has little, if anything, to do with Jesus.

But the secular and the sacred are not so separate as we might have imagined. That is, after all, the point. God has entered into the human story in the fullness of love. The holy has touched the ordinary, and the ordinary has been made holy.

There isn't a part of the world that is God's and a part that isn't. The goal of Christmas isn't to make our lives more spiritual and less ordinary. The goal is to see the holiness of all that is ordinary. Christmas calls us to see the holiness in all things and in all people. That is why it speaks with such hope and such power.

To paraphrase the words of Tiny Tim, "God bless us everyone, no exceptions."

- The Very Rev. Joe Reynolds, Dean, Christ Church Cathedral, Houston, Texas

Christ, the King

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Luke 22:35-43

In her book My Grandfather's Blessings, Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen tells the story of a colleague who was one of the few women on the university hospital faculty. A full professor of medicine, she was the model of the kind of physician her students wanted to become. A superb researcher, clinician, and teacher, her passion, energy, and dedication were legendary among the staff.

I hen she discovered a lump in her breast. The chief of the department performed her surgery and the mass was found to be malignant. The chief went to the recovery room to tell her the hard news as soon as she awakened. Still groggy from the anesthesia, she listened to the surgeon's words. She then closed her eyes for a brief time and said in a barely audible voice the most difficult words she had ever uttered: "Now someone will have to take care of me."

Her plight left the rest of the medical staff shaken. It had taken cancer for this hard-working physician to give herself permission to be cared for.

We are all in need of compassion, of forgiveness, of support, of assurance. All of us, in some way, to some degree, are vulnerable, hurting, despairing. In the shadow of the cross, we are able to finally admit our need for healing, for peace, for God.

Like the doctor who now must accept her own mortality and the care of others, the "good thief" hanging on the cross next to Jesus is finally able to see what his life has become and recognize his need for God — and Jesus does not disappoint him.

The hope of the cross begins with confronting our sinfulness and accepting responsibility for the wrong we do; only then can we begin to realize our potential for the healing and grace that can transform our lives in the love and hope of God.

On Christ the King Sunday, we stand on the edge of paradise and look through the doorway to heaven. When Jesus responds to the thief, he opens for him and all of us who may feel like this, the door to true freedom. Jesus invites us to enter into Paradise here and now, because he has already established the reign of God on earth. All we have to do

 and certainly this is no small task — is to put aside our hurts and slights, drop our demand for restitution and vengeance and realize our need to be recreated in the love of God.

The thief finally recognizes all of this and calls out to Jesus; and how does Jesus respond? With compassion and hope. So, as we close out yet another liturgical year and prepare ourselves for the coming of Advent, let us proclaim boldly this reign of God by saying: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

 The Rev. Mark L. Fitzhugh, Christ Church Greenwich, Greenwich, Connecticut

The Incarnation

I once heard a preacher refer to Jesus as one who was "born in the shadow of the cross." By this he meant that even at Jesus' birth we anticipate his crucifixion.

The preacher is entirely correct. However, if we primarily look at Jesus as the "man born to die," we miss the deeper truths of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. We are, without doubt, redeemed by Jesus' death and resurrection. But if the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is true, then Jesus'

entire life is redemptive. Because God took on human existence in Jesus, all aspects of human life have a transformed meaning. The ordinariness of our lives is no longer ordinary. Because God has joined with us in the trials and the tragedies, in the triumphs and the joys of everyday human existence, all of life is infused with new meaning.

The opening chapter of John's Gospel begins by telling us about the eternal "Word" who was with God from the beginning and who took on flesh in Jesus Christ. John writes, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth ... " (John 1: 14). Paul puts it very simply in his Epistle to the Galatians when he writes, " ... when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption" as children of God (4:4). And in his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul tells us that in the Incarnation Jesus Christ, "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (2:7). Paul adds that Jesus' death on the cross is the hallmark of his obedience and his self-humiliation.

We see, then, that the New Testament teaches that we must not only focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also on the mystery of his Incarnation. Why should we do this? As the Apostle Paul showed, the Incarnation of the Son of God provides us with a living testimony to the self-humiliation of God. In becoming human, the Son of God humbled himself and took on the form of a servant. Paul tells us that we should have a similar outlook. We should be willing to humble ourselves and serve others. The Incarnation of the Son of God provides us with a model of humble service.

The Incarnation also teaches us about the true nature of the relationship between God and his human children. God does not gaze on our existence from afar. God became an active participant in human life by becoming a human being in Jesus Christ. The mystery of the Incarnation means God's sharing in the sufferings and joys of numan existence are enduring. An early Christian Bishop, Leo the Great, said, "as long as we are in the body, the sufferings of Christ continue." Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, continues to share in our humanity. So,

when we contemplate the crucified Christ, we can truly see the sufferings of Jesus and those of crucified humanity. It seems much of American Christianity has departed from this central truth of the Christian faith. We seem to imagine Jesus as a transcendent being who bounces down to earth from heaven, suffers momentarily, and then bounces back. And we imagine such a Jesus can magically deliver us from the difficulties and sufferings of life. The deeper truth of the Incarnation is something altogether different. In Jesus Christ, God himself shared in human life and he continues share in our lives. The inevitable sufferings and the tragedies of our lives have a different meaning because of the Incarnation. Our sufferings are not ours alone. Jesus Christ truly is Emmanuel, "God with us."

Let's remember we are celebrating the Feast of the Incarnation; the birth of the Christ child. We are giving thanks that God came into our world in human form to redeem us.

The Very Rev. James H.
 Clendinen, St. John's,
 Bainbridge, Georgia

Questions for Christmas

Season's Greetings

This year I became aware that the Shopping Season is even developing its own sequence of holidays. First there is Black Friday, which is a good day because it is the day when stores go in the "black" because of their sales. The newest feast day is "Cyber Monday," a day holy to the practice of on-line shopping. No doubt other days of the week will soon be designated for special retail activity as well. Even though this may short-list me for this year's Ebenezer Scrooge Award, I don't think shopping is the answer.

If shopping isn't the answer, what is? If we are going to spend most of this month getting ready for Christmas anyway, what might we do that has a good chance to make us end the month feeling as though we have been personally blessed, that our community has been renewed, and that there is, indeed, hope and light for the world.

Put another way, can Christmas answer three basic and enduring questions: What about me? What about us? and What about them?

What about Me?

Take a moment to consider what you most desire for yourself. And then ask what is behind that desire - if your wish is for something more, something else, or something different, what is behind that desire? We're into deeper territory than the adult version of a child's list for Santa. Take a moment — this can be difficult and painful - to think about what is missing from your life, what you most regret, what you deeply wish you could change. These are difficult, scary questions; ones which we sometimes feel are pointless to ask because we doubt if anything significant can really change. We often devote considerable energy to not asking them and even to suppressing our conscious awareness that the issues exist. How much shopping do you think it will take to make all this lastingly better?

In Advent, we make an intentional effort to ask these hard, difficult, and even painful questions. Part of the purpose of Advent is to remind us of why we need a savior at all. If we were doing so well on our own, why would we need anyone else?

Part of the purpose of Christnas is to show us how God ntends to respond to what we nost need. First note that the answer is not an "answer," nor is t a magical suspending of the normal laws of nature, nor is it a airy tale ending. This deus is not ex machina but is in a manger. Mary does not prove to be a ong-lost princess, the value of he Magi's gifts seems to be more n their meaning than their monetary value, and for all of the angels and signs in the heavens, oseph and his family just barely get out of Bethlehem with no ime to spare before Herod's storm troopers come in and kill all the baby boys. We might want inswers, magic, wealth, or proection, but what we get is a peron whom we will come to know; examples of courage and aithfulness, new definitions of vealth and power, and warning of dangers which are never far way.

We get, in short, an invitation to new way of thinking, a new set of values, and a new way to live our lives — probably not the sort of thing you put on your Christmas list, but maybe what we all need the most. God's holiday invitation to you is to a transformed life.

What about Us?

The biblical Christmas story is very much a family and communal event, but not what you might expect. No sooner do we meet Joseph in Matthew's version than we see him trying to figure out how to break up with Mary with the least humiliation and embarrassment for the two of them. He's looking for something like the first century equivalent of "It's not you, really, it's me . . . " It takes God's direct intervention, in the dream-visit of an angel, for Joseph to discover that the right thing to do is just the opposite of what he was raised to believe. Family life was complicated for them, too.

We hear little of the emotional lives of Mary and Joseph in the story, but we see them each acting generously and graciously under extreme stress. In Luke's account we see Mary's perspective on her pregnancy, how she accepts her problematic status and, like Joseph in Matthew, sees in it God at work, regardless of what anyone else might think. seeks out her elder kinswoman, Elizabeth, whose warm welcome seems to help Mary to see her condition as a special blessing. Zechariah and Elizabeth, through their hospitality, help Mary to understand what the angel has said to her. Luke gives a good example of the power of God and God's people working in harmony for the common good.

By the end of the story, Mary and Joseph have each been brave in their own way - brave in facing down their doubt, in facing physical danger, in making difficult choices, and in staying together. Perhaps among the lessons for families and communities at Christmas is that difficult times can be opportunities for deeper blessings, what we have always believed needs to be tested against what God might be calling us to now, and loving acts of support and faithfulness are core elements of the health of the Holy, or any, family.

What about Them?

Are we allowed to talk about a "them," to think of some people as "those others"? Perhaps when the Kingdom of God is fully realized, such distinctions will cease to exist, but, for now, they seem to be a fact of our perspective. There are plenty of "thems" in the Christmas story.

It's perfectly fine for the shepherds to be abiding in the fields

by night with their flocks, as long as they stay there. But when they come down to where we are doing our best to survive a birth in a stable, I'm thinking, Wha else is going to happen tonight Shepherds are outsiders, unable by the demands of their profes sion, to keep the various require ments of the law. But they did not stumble onto the manger by accident; they were, in Luke's account, the only ones with a hand-delivered invitation from God. And God doesn't send jusa messenger; he dispatches the whole tabernacle choir in their best vestments to back up the message with a full chorus. It's a pretty big deal for working shep herds who generally never make it to the top of anyone's guest list ever. God is not just speaking platitudes about hospitality and inclusion, God is making sure the working people on the night shif get included first. God gives a good party.

If Luke makes it clear that the working poor are the honored guests, Matthew gives the place of honor to Arabs from the East unclean outsiders of a different sort than shepherds. The East was the direction of Babylon, the ancient place of exile, and Magwere certainly pagans, and

hether kings or astrologers, ere definitely not people oserving the traditions of the eople of God. And yet they, not e King in Jerusalem, were the nes zeroing in on the true King the Jews. The distinguished mple scholars knew that if the lessiah ever were actually to ome, it would be in Bethlehem, ut they were clueless that it was appening right now. The outders get it; the insiders, at best, e blind, but at worst are like erod who sends in his troops to ipe out the possibility of a estabilizing insurgency cenred on another "King of the ws."

he Christmas story reminds us at God sometimes speaks to hem" more directly and more early than to people like "us." od went to considerable ngths to be sure that night-shift appears and pagan astrologers of the word — they got tickets the premiere and practically a mo to deliver them to the redurpet. If that is how God treats hem," perhaps there is a lesson are for "us."

I think these stories can hold leir own against songs about easting chestnuts, melting downen, little drummer boys, and even, dare I say it, underappreciated reindeer. The essence of the Christmas story is not seeing a little good in everyone, being rescued by the unlikely hero, or celebrating a sentimentalized version of children. (In fact, Jesus is the only child in the actual Christmas story: God comes to us not to celebrate children, but to address the crippling and heartbreaking needs of all people, and, indeed, most of the children who are helped by Jesus are helped because their parents know him and go to him in faith.)

The essence of the Christmas story is that in the darkness, light shines, and the darkness does not overcome it. The other lights will be packed up and put away, trees will go to the curb, and all that we bought will fade away. But if we can take all that Christmas is really about, and, like Mary, ponder it in our hearts, then what a season, what lasting blessings, and what a life of joy and peace

lies ahead of us.

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